DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 496 FL 027 257

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TITLE The Self-Reported Perspectives Regarding Academic Writing among Taiwanese Graduate Students Specializing in TEFL.
INSTITUTION Texas Univ., Austin. Foreign Language Education Program.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Texas Foreign Language Education Conference (Austin, TX, March 23-24, 2001). For the complete journal issue, see FL 027 255.
PUB TYPE Journal Articles (080) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
JOURNAL CIT Texas Papers in Foreign Language Education; v6 n1 p19-35 Fall 2001
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Discourse; Elementary Secondary Education; *English (Second Language); Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Language Teachers; Preservice Teacher Education; Second Language Instruction; *Student Attitudes; *Writing (Composition); Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Taiwanese People; *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

ABSTRACT

This study explored how four Taiwanese graduate students specializing in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language at a U.S. university perceived the academic writing tasks required of them for their coursework. Collected over the course of one semester, data were derived from structured/semi-structured interviews with the students and reflective journals in which students recorded their writing experiences throughout the study period. The grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis was used. Results indicated that respondents believed that their previous English language training in Taiwan did not adequately prepare them for the writing tasks they encountered during their graduate studies in the United States. The master's and doctoral students had markedly different perceptions of academic writing as opposed to other types of writing. Respondents' perceptions of the art of academic writing were directly related to their perceived future roles as English instructors. They employed a variety of strategies to compose their academic writing projects. All respondents considered academic writing to be an anxiety-provoking event. Pedagogical implications of the study findings are noted. (Contains 38 references.) (SM)

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ED 464 496

The Self-Reported Perspectives Regarding Academic Writing among Taiwanese Graduate Students Specializing in TEFL

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This study explored how four Taiwanese graduate students (two Master's and two doctoral) specializing in Teaching English as a Second/Foreign Language at a U.S. university reported perceiving the academic writing tasks required of them for their coursework. Collected over the course of one semester (five months), data were derived from structured/semi-structured interviews with the respondents and reflective journals in which they were asked to record their writing experiences during the period of the study. Utilizing the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to data collection and analysis, the researcher detected four major themes emerging from the data: (a) Respondents reported that their previous English language training in Taiwan did not adequately prepare them for the writing tasks they encountered during their graduate studies in the U.S., (b) the Master's and doctoral students had markedly different perceptions of "academic writing" as opposed to other types of writing, (c) the respondents employed a variety of strategies to compose their academic writing projects, and (d) all of the respondents considered academic writing to be an anxiety-provoking event. Following a presentation of the findings, some of the pedagogical implications of the study are enumerated.

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INTRODUCTION

"When I am stuck in the process of writing, I will pray, and God is an inspiration. It really works! Especially on the content. ... As for the composition and for the language level, I can do it by myself." [Shih-hua]

As the enrollment figures for international graduate students in North American universities continue to increase, it is becoming increasingly important that the U.S. academy learn as much as possible about the challenges that these "world majority" (Fox, 1994) students face as they compose the writing tasks required of them. This is especially the case for international students in the social sciences, where the ability to express complex ideas in writing is often a bellwether of academic success (Schneider & Fujishima, 1995).

In recent years, researchers in the field of second language writing have investigated the writing experiences of international students of various nationalities as they compose papers for their coursework in the social sciences (e.g., Angelova & Riazantseva, 1999, *Indonesian, Russian,* and *Taiwanese*; Connor & Mayberry, 1996, *Finnish*; Jin, 1998, *Chinese*; Riazi, 1998, *Iranian*; Spack, 1997, *Japanese*; Yao, 1996, *Taiwanese*).

While these studies have yielded numerous beneficial results, none has focused primarily on a participant population consisting of graduate students

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enrolled in a TESL/TEFL program who plan to teach EFL after returning to their native countries. The present study, a pilot project conducted for the author's dissertation research, addresses this gap in the literature by investigating how a group of four Taiwanese graduate students (two doctoral and two Master's) reported to perceive their experiences writing for their studies in a U.S. Foreign Language Education program.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the research performed on both first and second language (hereafter, L1 and L2) writing over the past three decades reveals distinct interpretations of writers' thinking and composing behaviors, as well as the relationships formed between writers and their intended audiences (Riazi, 1998). Prior to the 1970s, learning to write was largely seen as the accurate application of grammatical and rhetorical rules through habit formation. Following the paradigm shift that occurred after Emig's (1971) landmark study, The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders, L1 writing researchers began focusing on the processes employed by writers as they composed texts rather than on the written product itself. Later known as the cognitivist (or "writing as problem solving") view, proponents of this perspective maintained that writing is a combination of higher order thinking skills in which writers first identify a problem and plan a writing task and then refine their thinking through specific stages of revising and editing (Flower, 1985, 1989).

During the 1980s, however, many L1 writing researchers came to question the findings of the cognitivists' research on the grounds that it failed to consider the role of the context in which writers compose texts. Heavily influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1962, 1978), who stressed the importance of the social context of language, and by Bakhtin's (1975) notion of the dialogic nature of language, these researchers contended that writing is not a cognitive process composed in a vacuum but rather involves a series of social communicative interactions between writers and their intended audiences (e.g., Nystrand, 1990; Nystrand, Greene & Wiemelt, 1993). Similarly, researchers such as Bartholomae (1988), Bruffee (1986), and Poole (1992), who later came to be known as proponents of the social constructionist school, posited that writers compose as members of discourse communities and that the rhetorical styles that dictate how meaning is conveyed in such communities are continuously co-constructed by their members.

Beginning in the late 1980s, increased attention was also being given to graduate programs as research sources for the study of L1 discipline-specific language learning. Berkenkotter, Huckin, and Ackerman (1988) chronicled the travails of a first year composition rhetoric graduate student (a native speaker) as he learned to strike a balance between his own writing style and the more formal style preferred by his instructors. Using this study as a springboard, other L1 scholars have explored the experiences of students in the natural sciences

(Belcher, 1994; Herrington, 1985; Myers, 1985) and in the social sciences (Casanave, 1995; Chin, 1994; Prior, 1991, 1998) as they learned to write for their respective fields.

In the early 1990s, L2 researchers began applying the findings of studies conducted on L1 writers to the circumstances of international students enrolled in North American universities. For the most part, those who carried out this type of research viewed international students as "outsiders" who undergo a process of acculturation (Schumann, 1978) in their struggle to learn the rhetorical conventions and overall "ways of knowing" (Geertz, 1973) of their academic disciplines.

Angelova and Riazantseva (1999) investigated the experiences of four nonnative speaker (NNS) first-year students in a U.S. Foreign Language Education program and noted significant differences in how each of the participants interpreted his or her writing assignments. Connor and Mayberry (1996) examined the processes applied by a Finnish graduate student in writing a term paper for an economics course at a U.S. university and found that his frequent interactions with his U.S. classmates played a definitive role in how he conceptualized the writing task. Hansen (2000) conducted a case study of a Taiwanese mathematics major in a graduate-level EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course and discovered that the participant experienced substantial conflict between writing for the discourse community of her field and writing for her ESL class. Riazi (1998) investigated the writing of four Iranian doctoral students studying at a Canadian college of education and found that they relied on a variety of cognitive, meta-cognitive, search, and social interaction strategies to complete the writing tasks required of them. Riazi also posited that the participants' unfamiliarity with the rhetorical conventions of their field was more debilitating than their lack of English proficiency. Schneider and Fujishima (1995) reported on a case study of a Taiwanese graduate student who was unsuccessful in his studies despite high levels of motivation and discipline. The authors concluded that the participant's lackluster academic performance stemmed from a combination of his lack of English proficiency and an overall misunderstanding of the integral role that writing plays in the academic culture of the U.S. university. Reporting on a three-year case study of a Japanese student in an undergraduate political science program at a U.S. university, Spack (1997) found that as the participant became increasingly acculturated into the U.S. collegiate writing experience, she became better at predicting her instructors' expectations for the writing tasks they assigned. Finally, Yao (1996) chronicled the difficulties experienced by a Taiwanese graduate student at a U.S. university in writing her dissertation proposal. Overall, the participant's greatest setback was a lack of exposure to the research paper genre.

Research Questions

None of the studies that comprise this growing body of literature has focused primarily on NNS graduate students enrolled in TEFL programs who plan to teach EFL upon returning to their native countries. The present study, conducted at a major research university in the southwestern U.S., addresses this void in the literature by examining qualitatively how a group of four Taiwanese graduate students in a Foreign Language Education program perceive the academic writing tasks required of them. The following three questions guided the study: (a) how do Taiwanese graduate students specializing in TESL/TEFL at a U.S. university report their experiences producing academic writing in English? (b) what strategies do they report employing as they negotiate the academic writing tasks required of them for their studies? and (c) how do they perceive academic writing for their field compared to other forms of writing?

Participants and Setting

The respondents for this study were four Taiwanese graduate students (two doctoral students and two Master's) ranging in age from their mid 20s to their mid 30s. One of the doctoral students was male and the other three students were female. To be considered for participation in the study, the respondents had to have completed their undergraduate education in Taiwan, be specializing in TESL/TEFL in the Foreign Language Education program at the university where the study took place, and plan to teach English upon returning to Taiwan.

Consisting of a total of 79 doctoral and Master's students, the Foreign Language Education program in which the study took place was comprised of 43 percent native-English speakers and 53 percent international students (from Korea, Iran, the People's Republic of China, Mexico, Japan, Thailand, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia). Among these international students, there were ten Taiwanese, who made up about 13 percent of the total student population of the program.

The Researcher

Because the researcher is the "primary measuring instrument" (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1998) in qualitative research, it is appropriate that I sketch a brief description of my background to add to the "trustworthiness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1995) of the findings presented herein.

A recent graduate of the Foreign Language Education doctoral program at the university where the study took place, I have studied Mandarin formally and informally in the Republic of China [Taiwan], the People's Republic of China, and Singapore for a total of seven years.

To supplement my doctoral studies, I served as a writing instructor to international graduate students for about five years. Taiwanese students typically made up about 20 percent of the student bodies of these courses. None of the participants in this study was a former or current student.

Sampling Procedures

The semester prior to conducting the study, I discussed the project with an informed insider in the Taiwanese community of the academic program in which the study took place (*snowball sample*, Gall, Borg & Gall, 1998). I then made a list of the Taiwanese Master's and doctoral students in the Foreign Language Education Program and randomly selected two graduate students and two doctoral students.

Participant Profiles

This section sketches a brief description of the participants of the study. (For further information, please refer to Table 1 below.) All names are pseudonyms, and some of the biographical information has been slightly altered to protect the respondents' identity.

Shih-hua. Shih-hua, a doctoral student in his mid-30s, had received his undergraduate degree in English Literature from a prestigious Catholic university in northern Taiwan. Prior to commencing his doctoral studies, Shih-hua earned a Master's in Foreign Language Education at a different U.S. university. He returned to Taiwan to teach English at a university for two years to fulfill the teaching requirements of his doctoral program.

At the time of the study, Shih-hua was married and had two children; his wife and children were living in Taiwan, waiting for him to finish his doctoral studies. He planned to complete his studies as soon as possible so he could be reunited with his family and begin searching for a tenure-track position at a university in Taiwan.

Shu-chih. Shu-chih was in her early 30s at the time of the study. Among the respondents, she reported to have the most extensive L1 writing experience. Before entering her doctoral program, she had earned a Master's at a different U.S. university. Returning to Taiwan after completing her Master's program, Shu-chih worked as a journalist for a prominent (Mandarin-language) newspaper in Taiwan for two years. She also taught English at a Taiwanese university for three years. A highly motivated student, Shu-chih exuberated confidence that her highly-developed L1 writing proficiency would transfer to her L2 writing over time. Shu-chih was married and had one child.

Yao-hua. In her mid-20s, Yao-hua was in the third semester of her Master's program at the time of the study. She had received her bachelor's degree in English from a prestigious university in northern Taiwan, where she had been required to write a majority of her undergraduate coursework in English.

After receiving her bachelor's degree, Yao-hua worked for two years as a salesperson at a trading company in a city in northern Taiwan. At this job, she communicated regularly with customers in English through e-mail. She also spent two years as an instructor at a private language school, where she taught English to high school students. Following graduation from her Master's

program, Yao-hua planned to return to Taiwan with her husband to teach English at a high school in her hometown.

Su-huan. In her early 20s and single, Su-huan was in the fourth semester of her Master's studies at the time the study took place. Having majored in Japanese, Su-huan came into her degree program with only limited experience writing in English. After she received her Master's degree, Su-huan planned to return to Taiwan to teach English at the senior high school level.

METHOD

The principal data gathering instruments for the study were two structured/semi-structured (one to one-and-a-half hour) audio-taped interviews with each participant, informal interviews with respondents (e.g., passing in the hallways between classes), the participants' reflective journals, and drafts of their writing that they voluntarily submitted for analysis. In an attempt to limit researcher bias, I also recorded my own observations in a comprehensive journal throughout the course of the study. The audio-taped interviews totaled about twelve hours, yielding about 200 pages of transcribed data.

The time lapse between the two structured interviews was about five weeks. This respite not only gave respondents ample time to reflect on the development of their writing between interviews, but also facilitated member checking, a process through which the researcher meets with the respondents of the study to confirm the accuracy of his or her data collection devices up to that point in the investigation. Following the first interview, I provided each participant with a transcription of our meeting, and the first fifteen minutes of the second interview were devoted to confirming the accuracy of the transcription.

DATA ANALYSIS

Because I hoped to gain an understanding of how the respondents, as future EFL teachers, perceived academic writing as NNS's in the U.S. academic environment, I employed the grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to this type of qualitative research, data analysis is an inductive and on-going process. The investigator codes the data in three distinct ways (open, axial, and selective) with the goal of allowing unexpected categories and eventually theory to emerge from the data. Furthermore, through persistent engagement and prolonged exposure, the analyst attempts to describe the respondents' reality from their own (emic) perspective.

Throughout the study, I conducted a series of steps to ensure the objectivity of my data-collection methods. After each interview and reading/coding session, I drafted a memo of my reactions to what I was observing in the data. I then transcribed the interviews and coded the data by searching for reoccurring themes in the data. In the process of open coding, for

example, I entered all of the codes onto a master list and divided them into forty-seven categories. After an extensive weeding out process, I re-analyzed the data to ascertain how the forty-seven categories played out in the circumstances of each participant.

As a means of conducting a subjectivity audit, I met with a peer debriefer, a native-English speaker enrolled in the same program, four times over the course of the study. In our meetings, I asked my colleague to code data samples according to the procedures outlined above. When we compared our analyses, we detected only minor differences in the resulting codes and categories (a roughly 96 percent rate of consensus).

I initially intended to perform an informal analysis of my respondents' writing samples. As the study progressed, however, I decided instead to use the respondents' written products to stimulate conversation in the interviews.

The second form of respondents' writing used as data was the participant process log, which provided insight into the participants' writing experiences that were not fleshed out in the interviews. Each participant (save one participant, who was unable to keep a process journal) submitted at least five log entries.

FINDINGS

Four themes surfaced in my analysis of the data: (a) The respondents reported that their previous English language training in Taiwan did not adequately prepare them for the L2 writing demands of their graduate studies; (b) the Master's and doctoral students harbored different perceptions concerning what comprised academic writing; (c) the respondents reported using a wide variety of strategies in composing academic writing; and (d) all of the respondents considered academic writing to be an anxiety-provoking event.

The Teaching of English Writing in Taiwan

According to the respondents, the teaching of English in Taiwan, especially in junior and senior high school, is taught primarily according to the Grammar Translation Method, with the objective being to prepare students for college entrance examinations. Although this training reportedly provided the respondents with a thorough understanding of English grammar, it placed minimal emphasis on the development of written or spoken competence. Other than rare cases in which they were taught by native-English-speaking instructors, the respondents reported that the English instruction they had received in Taiwan had been conducted predominantly in Mandarin.

The respondents also stated that writing receives scant attention in the Taiwanese English classroom because the English writing component of the college entrance examinations contributes only minimally to test-takers' final scores. Su-huan summed up her high school English learning experiences accordingly: "They emphasize translation but nothing about the structure of the

writing, not at all! Maybe it's because we did everything for an entrance exam and the writing part takes up only a little bit part of the whole exam." In the same vein, Shu-chih reported that "in Taiwan, English teachers normally don't teach us how to write. We basically just read English textbooks and then memorize the grammar rules to prepare for our college entrance examination. We just study grammar."

Regarding training in English writing at the university level, the participants reported that they were mostly instructed to compose "free writing" exercises (e.g., on topics such as "My Summer Vacation"). They also responded that they were not taught pre-writing skills such as brainstorming, clustering, and outlining. Shu-chih described this: "I started to write in English in college because my instructor asked us to write, and he never did really teach us how to write. He just said, 'Okay, we have read this article. Now go write something. Write what you thought about this article. And just turn in your assignment!'" Similarly, Su-huan added: "In Taiwan, our professors didn't require us to follow any format, so we just write anything. I don't think we are required to write anything that seriously."

Differing Perceptions of Academic Writing and Other Types of Writing

A cross-case analysis of the data revealed a marked difference in how the doctoral students and the Master's students viewed academic writing. Whereas the Master's students drew stark comparisons between what they considered to be academic and personal writing, the doctoral students did not make such distinctions.

The Master's students' perceptions of academic writing. The Master's students spoke at length of their disdain for academic writing. Su-huan, for example, considered academic writing as "cruel" and "cold" because it forces the writer to conform to strict guidelines that hamper creativity. Conversely, she saw personal writing (e.g., e-mails to friends) as "warm" and "genuine" because it allowed her to "be herself" without fear of being evaluated by others. Su-huan described her feelings regarding these differences between academic and personal writing accordingly: "For academic writing, the audience might be my professors or other people. They don't care about what kind of person I am. They just care about what I say. In my personal writing, I'm writing to all of my friends. They care about me, about what I feel. It's very much different."

Similarly, Yao-hua denounced academic writing as "fake writing" because "audience and genre are contrived." Elaborating on this statement, she continued: "In academic writing, you are outside and not part of yourself. You are on the outside. You don't talk about your feelings." Yao-hua also reported that one of the chief differences between academic writing and personal writing is that one must use "fifty cent" words (that are different from real conversation) to construct an impersonal and detached voice in academic writing.

The doctoral students' perceptions of academic writing. The doctoral students, on the other hand, did not make such distinctions between academic and personal writing. Stating that the success of their future careers would ultimately be decided by their ability to publish articles in U.S.-refereed journals, they seemed to believe that all of the writing they composed during their graduate studies would contribute to the improvement of their English writing proficiency.

The doctoral students spoke positively of academic writing as a separate language skill that they would need to develop for their future careers. Shu-chih was optimistic that she could transfer effectively the L1 writing skills she had cultivated as a journalist to improving her English to what she termed an "acceptable state." She compared composing academic writing to "reciting music for an audience." When asked what academic writing was not, she replied: "Driving down the highway on cruise control. It is not something you just do relaxed. You must always be thinking - and it is a very long highway!"

Like Shu-chih, Shih-hua expressed fewer negative sentiments regarding academic writing than the Master's students. Strongly influenced by a psychology course he was taking, he spoke of writing as a means of "constructing knowledge." He said that "writing is a kind of construction, and it's a very important approach for me to build up my understanding....If I didn't do any writing, it's hard for me to remember what I have read." Shih-hua also compared the processes involved in composing academic writing to digging a well ("You dig - trying to find something - and water comes out!") and the construction of an architectural structure ("First, you build the basement and then the support and then the roof - but it must be planned first.").

Interestingly, the doctoral students also spoke of academic writing as a means of solving immediate and future problems. Shu-chih, for example, viewed academic writing as way to compensate for her lack of participation in classroom discussions, a behavioral pattern she attributed to her formative education in Taiwan. For her, "writing assignments is one way that you can express your knowledge in class. This is ONE WAY that you can show to your instructor that you really know something and that you really studied."

Strategies Employed for Academic Writing

Altogether, the respondents reported to employ more than two dozen different strategies when writing the texts required of them for their graduate studies. Among these, only two were mentioned by all of the participants: Social interactive strategies (e.g., discussing assignments with instructors or classmates) and modeling strategies (e.g., writing off of templates provided by instructors or classmates).

Individually, however, the respondents reported a broad array of strategies in their approaches to their writing assignments. Shi-hua, for example, relied on the following eight strategies:

1. Extensive reading to maximize input and become familiar with the appropriate register of the genre at hand.
2. Beginning writing projects as early as possible in the semester.
3. Creating graphs of subject matter as a means of constructing meaning.
4. Mining templates for terms to use in future writing assignments.
5. Divine intervention (prayer).
6. Extensive outlining and pre-writing organization.
7. Analyzing native speaker and non-native speakers' e-mail messages.
8. Transferring L1 writing strategies to composing in the L2.

Academic Writing as an Anxiety-Provoking Task

It would not be possible to accurately describe the respondents' emic perspectives without addressing the tremendous anxiety the participants reported attaching to the composition of academic writing. Two major sources of this anxiety continuously surfaced in the data. First, the respondents reported to have received what they considered minimal training writing in English in their formative education in Taiwan. The second reported source of anxiety among the respondents was a deep-seated concern that unintended others would read their writing, discover imperfections in the content or grammar, and judge them accordingly.

Before discussing further these anxiety-provoking aspects of L2 writing, it is important to mention the extremely high expectations the respondents appeared to place on themselves. From our conversations, I gathered that these expectations were the result of two interrelated factors: (a) the respondents were "high achievers" who had succeeded in an extremely competitive educational system in Taiwan, and (b) they planned to serve as English teachers in an educational environment that places a premium on grammatical accuracy. Among the two, the latter was mentioned the most frequently. Shih-hua, for example, said that "it means a lot for me to be as perfect as possible at ALL AREAS of English grammar because I am a TEACHER! As a teacher, YOU HAVE TO BE CORRECT!"

Lack of English writing experience. The first identified source of anxiety among the respondents was the reported lack of experience in writing the types of compositions required of them for their coursework. Since, according to the respondents, the chief focus of EFL instruction in Taiwan is to prepare students for high school and college entrance examinations, they all felt that their EFL instruction had left them ill-prepared for the written component of their graduate studies in the U.S. All of the respondents stated that they were often unsure as to what their U.S. professors expected of them when using such terms as essay, research paper, and term project. Shu-chih stated: "But you know I found that to do a research paper, it's totally different from what I've been writing in Taiwan. That's my major concern." Surprisingly, this was even true of

Yao-hua, who reported to have received training in what she referred to as "U.S.-style essay writing" during her undergraduate studies.

The repercussions of writing anxiety. The respondents also reported to experience various forms of writer's block due to what I perceived as a preoccupation with grammatical accuracy. Their former training according to the Grammar Translation Method had instilled in them an extremely low tolerance for errors. Shih-hua said that this concern for correctness influenced his ability to express himself in written English. He described this: "I have to write correct stuff. CORRECT! And sometimes I will find little mistakes and I cannot express myself fully" (See Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert (1999) for a fascinating investigation into the relationship between L2 language learning and writing anxiety among Taiwanese university students).

This concern for accuracy was detrimental to the respondents' writing because it caused them to over-monitor their written output. The more they monitored their writing, the more difficult they found it to explore their thoughts when writing. Reflecting on her experiences, Shu-chih remarked: "I don't have much writing experience in English, so I will feel insecure about writing. After I write a sentence, I have to check, I have to look it up in the dictionary to make sure I'm writing the correct sentence....And I have to be very, very careful about the word usage."

These concerns about grammatical accuracy, not to mention worries regarding the accuracy of the content, aggravated respondents' anxieties that their mistakes would be exposed to others. As mentioned above, a source of this fear was that their classmates or instructors would judge them according to their limited writing proficiency. This is evident in the following statement by Su-huan:

> I don't know. I just feel that I am not confident enough about my academic ability. Yeah, I don't think I have critical thinking or if I can analyze articles or materials correctly. I just worry that if I write something wrong and I submit it to my supervisor she will be angry or she will laugh at me.

Similarly, Shu-chih reported facing a dilemma because one of her classes required her to participate in an on-line writing community that she feared would expose her English errors to her classmates. To avoid a potentially "face-losing" situation, she posted her entries as late as possible, diminishing the likelihood that her classmates would be able to read them in time for class. She described her choice for adopting this type of avoidance strategy: "It's because I don't have much confidence. If I could write really well, of course I will welcome everyone to see my writing. 'Be my guest!' But right now, I'm not good enough."

Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that the respondents' perceptions of academic writing, the strategies they employed to compose the texts required for their coursework, and the anxieties they reported feeling while writing in English for their coursework were as diverse as the individuals themselves. At the same time, however, some of the respondents' statements support generalized conclusions. The purpose of this section is to evaluate these shared tendencies in an effort to understand the respondents' perceptions of academic writing.

First, all of the respondents reported that composing academic writing was an anxiety-provoking activity. One source of this anxiety, they reported, was related to their formative education in Taiwan, where English is taught through the Grammar Translation Method with the primary purpose of preparing students for high stakes entrance examinations. Judging from the data gathered for this study, it appears as if the heightened emphasis the Taiwanese educational system places on grammatical accuracy led to a hyper-concern for grammatical correctness. Moreover, the respondents' approaches to academic writing in their graduate programs appear to have been strongly influenced by the aforementioned concern for grammatical accuracy.

The respondents' perceptions and anxieties concerning academic writing were also influenced by what they considered to be a lack of L2 writing experience in their previous English learning. Although the respondents had acquired a solid foundation in the mechanics of writing grammatically correct sentences, after beginning their U.S. graduate studies they discovered what Shu-chih referred to as the one-sidedness of her formative English training (the focus on grammatical accuracy at the expense of communicative competence).

Furthermore, because the respondents were training to be teachers in an educational system that places a heavy emphasis on grammatical correctness, their future success as English teachers would depend on the grammatical quality of their written and spoken English. Perhaps this explains why the two doctoral students were more concerned with the "correctness" of their written English than the two Master's students. The doctoral students would be teaching at the higher level, where their errors might be more conspicuous due to the complexity of the course materials and their students' own English proficiency.

All of the respondents expressed a concern that their errors would be detected by future readers of their writing. In fact, among the language learning skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and culture), the respondents overwhelmingly perceived writing to be the most threatening because any errors would be permanently exposed to known and unknown readers.

These concerns led to the respondents' tendency to over-monitor their written output. Driven by the focus on sentence-level accuracy from their previous EFL training in Taiwan, and compounded by the fact that they were training to serve as teachers (who "CANNOT MAKE MISTAKES" [Shu-chih]),

the respondents reported that writing was a grueling process requiring vast amounts of time. In their desire to produce mistake-free texts, the respondents appeared to have placed themselves in a vicious and apparently perpetual cycle. The higher the respondents set their expectations for the finished product, the longer it took to express the ideas they were trying to write. Adding to this anxiety was the necessity to budget time between the writing project at hand and their other coursework.

Another finding of the study is that the respondents' reported perceptions of the act of academic writing were directly related to their perceived future roles as instructors of English. The Master's students appeared to view the learning of academic writing as a temporary obstacle to overcome so they could receive their advanced degrees and return to teach English at the high school level. At no point in the study did they give the impression that they would be required to write extensively in English to preserve their future jobs.

The doctoral students, on the other hand, viewed the acquisition of academic writing skills as a long-term goal. Because of their perceived future need to produce academic writing to sustain their roles as professors or researchers, the doctoral students expressed a need to hone their written competency so they could earn the respect of their colleagues and compete with other doctoral students in what they described as an increasingly competitive marketplace. Another concern expressed by both of the doctoral students was whether their English would improve to the point that they would be able to publish their scholarly work in reputable U.S.-refereed journals, an increasingly important requirement for scholarly advancement in Taiwan.

Pedagogical Implications

Several pedagogical implications can be derived from the present study. First, after returning to their native country from their studies in the U.S., instructors such as the participants of this study could strive to implement pedagogical approaches that de-emphasize the importance of grammar in the L2 classroom. By placing greater emphasis on composition in the instruction of L2 writing, for example, instructors might encourage students to view writing in English as a means of self-expression rather than just another means of being evaluated. Teachers might find that this pedagogical approach works best when they adopt the role as a learning coach (who scaffolds students' learning through all stages of the writing process) rather than an autocratic authority whose chief role is to identify errors and dispense correct answers.

In recent years, L1 and L2 scholars have enjoyed remarkable success with the implementation of alternative forms of writing instruction, such as electronic chat rooms in which students communicate with each other or with students in English-speaking countries in real-time (Harrington, Rickly, & Day, 2000). The outlook for employing these new methods is promising in that they not only

encourage contact between students but also reinforce the notion that writing in the L2 can be a potentially rewarding communicative activity.

A final implication derived from the present study is that faculty in U.S. institutions share the responsibility of preparing international students for the writing challenges they will encounter during studies in their respective departments. Faulty could do this by encouraging international students at the onset of their graduate studies to enroll in adjunct writing courses that emphasize the cultural factors at work when one composes in an L2. Academic departments could also implement cohort systems with the goal of facilitating interaction between native and non-native students as they compose collaborative writing projects.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While I made every effort to ensure the transferability of the present study to other cases and other populations, it is important to note several limitations of this study. One such limitation is that the data gathered were based on the reported experiences of the respondents. According to Sternglass and Pugh (1986), "The validity of such [reported] accounts cannot be judged in any absolute or definitive way. We don't know whether the person is conscientiously attempting to describe behaviors and mental processes as they occurred or is editing those experiences" (p. 299). Moreover, as the respondents obviously had high expectations of themselves, it is possible that the respondents' assessments of themselves as writers were unrealistically critical. Further study would be needed to make a more objective evaluation of the respondents' proficiency in academic writing.

Another limitation is that the small population sample may not be representative of all Taiwanese graduate students in the field of second language education. The question as to the efficacy of generalizing from such a minute population of Taiwanese graduate students resides, of course, with the reader. Perhaps a more in-depth longitudinal study over the length of several years (e.g., Spack, 1997) with a larger number of participants (e.g., Johanson, 2001) would provide a more complete picture of how students' attitudes regarding academic writing change over time.

A final limitation of the study is that it does not attempt to ascertain similarities or differences between the respondents' writing experiences and those of their native-speaking classmates. It is possible, and indeed likely, that native speakers would harbor concerns similar to those reported by the respondents' (e.g., the fear of others' detecting errors in their writing) in their attempts to compose for their advanced studies. Indeed, further exposure to native-speaker writing (in first draft form) would likely reveal that even native speakers experience tremendous difficulty with the processes involved in composing academic writing. Further studies are needed to compare the writing

experiences of native and non-native writers in the demanding context of graduate school.

CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to identify how a group of four Taiwanese graduate students perceived the task of academic writing as they completed the writing necessary for their coursework. It was found that both the Master's and the doctoral respondents perceived academic writing as a unique form of writing (as opposed to personal writing) that is often anxiety-provoking. Potential sources of this anxiety were the respondents' lack of experience writing U.S.-style academic writing, the desire for grammatical perfection in their writing imbued in them by their formative educational experiences in Taiwan, and the high expectations they placed on themselves as English teachers in an educational system that places a premium on grammatical accuracy. Furthermore, the respondents over-monitored their composing processes and expressed concern that mistakes in their written English might be detected by others. This compounded their anxiety because it slowed down their writing processes to the point that they feared they would be unable to complete all of their assigned writing projects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express his appreciation to the four respondents for volunteering their time to participate in the study. He would also like to thank Stanley Johanson, Diane Schallert, and the anonymous reviewers of the TexFLEC editorial board for their comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript.

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